

## WHAT ELSE?

### Can I get vaccinated against pandemic influenza?

At this time there is no influenza pandemic, nor is there a vaccine available for a pandemic influenza. However, as part of efforts to prepare for a possible pandemic involving avian influenza, the federal government is supporting the development and testing of candidate vaccines. Clinical trials to evaluate these vaccines are under way.

Health experts do recommend that you get an annual vaccination against seasonal influenza.

### Is it safe to eat poultry?

Eating poultry or poultry products has not been associated with influenza. However, other infections, such as E. coli and salmonella, can be a concern. It is safe to eat poultry products as long as they are cooked properly, to 165 degrees Fahrenheit. High temperatures used in cooking will kill both bacteria and viruses.

### Is it safe to travel to countries where people have contracted H5N1 avian influenza?

The risk to travelers is very low. Only rare cases of human infection with avian influenza have occurred. There has been no sustained human to human transmission. Travelers to areas affected by H5N1 should avoid direct contact with live poultry and wild birds and with surfaces contaminated with their feces. Don't eat raw or undercooked poultry since it may have been contaminated with feces, and exercise good personal hygiene, including frequent hand-washing.

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## What You Need to Know about PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

Montana Department of Public Health  
and Human Services  
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# Frequently Asked Questions About Pandemic Influenza

## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

- **Pandemic influenza**

*A worldwide disease outbreak that occurs when a new influenza A virus causes serious human illness and spreads easily from person to person. Currently, there is no influenza pandemic.*

- **Seasonal influenza**

*A respiratory virus that infects some people each year, usually in the winter. In most people, symptoms are not life-threatening and last no more than 7-10 days. Most people have some immunity to seasonal influenza, and an annual flu shot can help protect against it. Nonetheless, about 36,000 Americans die of seasonal influenza each year.*

- **Avian influenza**

*Also called bird flu. Avian influenza viruses occur naturally among birds. There are many strains, some more virulent than others. Public health officials are currently monitoring an outbreak of a highly pathogenic variant known as H5N1, which has caused deaths among poultry and wild birds in some parts of the world. It has also caused illness and some deaths among humans who live or work in close proximity to poultry. There is no human immunity to H5N1, and no vaccine is available.*

- **Influenza A & B**

*Influenza A viruses are found in many different animals, including humans, ducks, chickens, pigs, whales, horses, and seals. Influenza A is primarily a respiratory disease, causing cough, congestion, sore throat, muscle aches, fatigue, and fever in most species it infects. Influenza B viruses circulate widely only among humans and tend to cause less serious illness. They do not cause pandemics.*

## WHAT'S THE RISK?

Pandemic influenza is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza A virus appears in humans, causes serious illness, and then spreads easily from person to person worldwide because we have no built-up immunity to it.

**No one knows when the next pandemic will strike or how serious it will be.** Three influenza pandemics of varying intensity occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> century: in 1918, 1957, and 1968.

Scientists and health officials believe an influenza pandemic could pose a significant threat to our health, our economy, and our way of life. That's why efforts are under way at the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and at local and tribal health departments to plan for the complex issues and serious impacts that a new influenza pandemic could cause in Montana.

Much has changed since the last pandemic influenza outbreak, both in the fields of medicine and public health and in our ability as individuals to travel across the globe. So it's difficult to know how serious a new pandemic would be.

What we do know is that **public health officials, including those at the national, state, and local level, have vastly improved their ability to detect and control infectious diseases**, and they've become more vigilant. They will know when a new and serious strain of influenza emerges and will be able to take precautions—and help the public take precautions—to reduce its impacts.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

Health officials recommend that every family have an emergency preparedness plan so you're better prepared to react during a crisis such as a severe influenza pandemic. As you plan, **it's important to think about the challenges you might face**. In the case of an influenza pandemic, these could include:

- Disruption of such services as hospitals, banks, stores, restaurants, government offices, and post offices.
- Cancellation of public gatherings, such as volunteer meetings and worship services.
- The need to care for people with special needs if the services they rely on are not available.

One way to start planning is to make a list of what things you would need to get by if you were confined to your home for a week or two.

**Good hygiene can be an effective defense** against viruses such as pandemic and seasonal influenza. You can help protect yourself and others by:

- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Washing your hands thoroughly and often.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Staying home when you are sick.

**To learn more about preparing for a possible influenza pandemic, visit [www.pandemicflu.mt.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.mt.gov)**